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ABSTRACT

In response to a survey on attitudes and practices of teachers of first-year college composition, this study notes an anomaly related to resistance (apparent unwillingness or discomfort) on the part of respondents to limit themselves to the constraints of the objective survey items. This condition was considered to produce potential problems in the conclusions that could be drawn from the quantitative interpretation of these survey items. This study explores a way to improve the interpretation of these findings. Participants were 122 instructors in first-year composition at 14 colleges (community colleges and four-year colleges and universities). Using a mixed methodology approach increased the accuracy of the interpretation of the construct being measured by a survey instrument on composition instruction. This methodology can improve the usefulness of the survey. An appendix contains tables of study data. (Contains 4 tables and 24 references.) (SLD)

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Running Head: MIXED METHOD

ED 464 092

# Improving the Interpretation of a Survey Instrument by Applying a Mixed Method Conceptualization: Research on the Teaching of College Composition

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## Abstract

In a response to a survey on attitudes and practices of teachers of first-year college composition, the authors noted an anomaly related to resistance (i.e., apparent unwillingness or discomfort) on the part of respondents to limit themselves to the constraints of the objective survey items. Needless to say, this condition would produce potential problems in appropriate conclusions being drawn from the quantitative interpretation of these survey items. The objective of this paper is to explore a way to improve the interpretation of these findings. Specifically, using a mixed methodological approach increased the accuracy of interpretation of the construct being measured by a survey instrument on composition instruction and can improve its utilitarian value.


## Introduction

Since the late 1960s, compositionists have engaged in a war of words over which instructional methods should be honored and valued above all others. It could be argued that the paradigm wars of the qualitative and quantitative camps has been fought on concurrent but different battlefields during this same time period. Our intent in this paper is to take up Peter Elbow's (2000) challenge of rejecting the denigration of one position as a requirement of advancing another. Instead, we will argue that the research community is only well-served when the research methodology matches the purpose(s) that underlie the studies we undertake. We will be referring to several purposes, all related, throughout this paper, which are best explored through a mixed methodological approach - using both qualitative and quantitative methods - to investigate phenomena of interest. In this case, our interest is composition instruction in higher education settings. Our intent in this paper is two-fold: first, we will present the case for the efficacy of a mixed methodological approach in understanding a phenomenon like composition instructors' philosophical orientations to their craft, at least as it can be measured by a survey instrument; and second, to argue that it is necessary to understand any research in terms of its purpose before one can determine whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodological choices are appropriate.

In presenting our findings, we've chosen to use an inductive approach, moving from an analysis of the specific example of composition instructors' attitudes and practices to the more general discussion of purpose, a mode of inquiry representative of qualitative researchers. We could have chosen to reverse the order. We are not trying here to be philosophically pure but are using a mix of methods to help us answer our questions and, we intend, to clarify our own inquiry, both for ourselves and a more general readership.

In order to understand the conceptualization of the construct validation effort of the instrument, the Survey of Attitudes and Practices of Teachers of Freshman Composition (SAPTFC), that led to the current study, one must first understand the constructs the instrument was trying to measure. Therefore, we begin with background information on the constructs themselves. We then describe the quantitative methods that we used to estimate the effectiveness of the SAPTFC in measuring these constructs with the original sample. We then discuss the artificial bifurcation of quantitative and qualitative paradigms and highlight the importance of purpose in determining the methodology chosen. Finally, we present the multiple purposes that drove our inquiry and the results of the study as viewed through mixed methodological lenses.

Surveying Composition Teachers' Attitudes and Practices

In a study of first-year college composition teachers, instructors (N=303) at 14 community colleges, four-year colleges and universities in Northeastern Ohio were surveyed about their attitudes towards and practices in teaching first-year writers. They completed the Survey of Attitudes and Practices of Teachers of Freshman Composition, or SAPTFC (Kropp, 1983), an instrument based upon a generalized theory of instructional archetypes in higher education settings (Broudy, 1972). Broudy classified instruction into three superordinate groups: Didactics, Heuristics, and Philetics. While Broudy's classifications were generalized across disciplines, he contended that these "three types of teaching strategy or teaching style . . . differ in the kinds of results they can achieve, and although they are related, they are relatively independent of each other" (p. 255).

Didactics, Philetics, and Heuristics in the College Composition Classroom

While Broudy's classifications were generalized across disciplines at the college level, these three schemes for viewing teaching can also be seen as ways that compositionists view their discipline. In designing, developing and testing the SAPTFC, Kropp (1983) operationalized these three approaches with a series of statements reflective of the attitudes and practices that were determined to be unique to each of them. She further assumed that attitudes were causes rather than correlates of practice. While the latter claim was disputed within the literature (Mischel, 1968; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell & Lloyd, 1991), numerous scholars (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Rosenberg & Hovland, 1966; Zimbardo & Ebbesen, 1970) agreed with the basic logic of this position.

Didactics

In terms of practice, the teacher with a strong didactic orientation would fall neatly into the Current-Traditional paradigm (Berlin, 1985; Winterowd, 1994), a rhetorical approach which was based on positivistic notions, wherein reality and truth were located in the external, objective world and influenced by behaviorist psychology. The aim of improving one's didactics was to engage in the successful transmission of cultural traditions. As operationalized by Kropp (1983), teachers who held this view possessed two distinguishing attitudes. First, the teachers' primary obligation was to teach students to avoid errors in usage, sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. One way in which this was done was through direct instruction in grammatical correctness and syntactical appropriateness. Second, teachers were to instruct students in the production of correct, standard English prose. Students would be encouraged to read and imitate professional models, and they would be evaluated by the teacher's expertise and understanding of standards of excellence. The Current-Traditional paradigm has been the dominant pedagogical stance within composition for the past 100 years (Berlin, 1985; Walsh, 1991; Winterowd, 1994) and remained evident in recent textbooks (Crews, 1992; Hodges & Whitten, 1986).

Winterowd (1994) discussed the "legacies" of current-traditional rhetoric as being very explicit and somewhat limiting. In identifying these legacies, his first characteristic was that "[s]tyle and form become pretty much the 'all' of rhetoric" (p. 31). He also identified patterns of organization, such as five-paragraph essays, and classification of modes, such as description, narration, and exposition, as nearly universal in the practices of didactic-oriented teachers. Because of the elevation of style and form, instruction was often dealt with in a bottom-up manner and also tended to be rather

methodical, that is "a series of statements or injunctions leading students systematically through the composing process" (p. 31). Finally, the teacher's primary focus, if not exclusive concern, was to *correct* themes. As Kropp (1983) operationalized this *corrective* aspect in her work, the instructor "represents a learned functionary of the society or culture whose mission it is to convey knowledge to a relatively passive student body (p. 16). Since only instructors possess the knowledge, especially knowledge of correct grammar and syntax, it is incumbent upon them to *correct* students' papers as they seek to have their texts imitate the models they are provided. This text orientation, as opposed to the process orientation of philetic and heuristic teachers, provided the pedagogical foundation for the didactic teacher.

Philetics

Statements that reflected a Philetics approach were based on the Subjective Rhetorical approach of the Expressivist (Berlin, 1985, Fulkerson, 1979) or Romantic Rhetoricians (Winterowd, 1994), whose aim was to support the natural development of writing skill. They achieved these aims indirectly through free writing and the employment of student-designed topics in an atmosphere of encouragement and positive conversation. As operationalized by Kropp (1983), teachers who held this view possessed two distinctive attitudes toward the goals to which their students should strive. The course in composition should help students to express their personal views honestly and should facilitate their acceptance of writing as an activity that enhances their satisfaction with their own self-expression. Ideally, evaluation was by the students who recognized their growth in discussions with the instructor. The philetic approach shifted the focus of writing from a product-centered activity to a process-centered one (Berlin, 1985; Faigley, 1986; Winterowd, 1994). This approach was in evidence in recent college writing texts (Elbow & Belanoff, 1995; Sommers & McQuade, 1989).

In looking at the rise of subjective rhetoricians in the 1960s, Berlin (1985) noted that proponents of this view held similar opinions on the means to achieving their ends. The notion of environment was key. In this environment, the teacher could provide opportunities for students to learn to compose but could not actually teach composition. Through freewriting and journal writing, students could be encouraged to arrive at their own visions of reality. While editorial groups were encouraged, "the dialectic between the writer and the editorial group is designed to enable the writer to understand the manifestations of her identity in language through considering the reactions of others--not, for example, to begin to understand how meaning is shaped by discourse communities" (p. 153).

While this focus on honest, personal writing was advanced in the 1960s, it found a measure of acceptance in the 1970s as a response to the Current-Traditional paradigm which had held sway for so long. Calling upon Rogerian perspectives of self-actualization, this approach focused on the process that a student engaged in while writing. Writing as discovery, especially discovery of the self, was emphasized in some of the earliest works (Rohman & Wlecke, 1964) that characterized this approach and influenced some of its major proponents: most notably, Macrorie and Elbow.

From this perspective, Macrorie (1970) succinctly summarized the goals that teachers must promote; they "must find ways of getting students to produce (in words, pictures, sounds, diagrams, objects, or landscapes) what students and teachers honestly admire" (p. 186). For Macrorie, the overarching goal was to enable students to freely express themselves, to avoid the deadening effect of *Engfish*: "a feel-nothing, say-nothing language, dead like Latin, devoid of the rhythms of contemporary speech. A

dialect in which words are never 'attached to things'" (p. 18). While Macrorie was looking at what teachers must do to attain the goals of the philetics approach, Elbow (1973) was arguing that this form of expression would be better served without teachers. In his preface to Writing Without Teachers, he identified for his readers the purpose in writing the book as two-fold:

> 1) [T]o help you actually generate words better -- more freely, lucidly, and powerfully: not make judgments about words but generate them better; 2) to help you improve your ability to make your *own* judgment about which parts of your writing to keep and which to throw away. (pp. vii - viii)

In this preface, the goals of self-expression and self-satisfaction with one's own words were seen as paramount to the meaningful creation of written works. These goals of self-improvement and finding one's writing voice are at the heart of this approach.

Heuristics

Finally, the heuristic approach was based on a paradigm variously called New Rhetorical (Winterowd, 1994), Emerging Systems (Johnson, 1980), Mimetic (Fulkerson, 1979) or Transactional (Berlin, 1985), wherein the instructor's intention was to stimulate the growth of intellect in the students. This goal would be accomplished indirectly, with teachers setting problems and presenting systematic methods for discovering and working out ideas, and students designing and carrying out topics to address these problems. Ideally, evaluations would be withheld until near the end of the course with grades being determined by the students, their peers and the instructor. In the heuristic approach, reality was located in the interaction of the features of the rhetorical process (Berlin, 1985). As operationalized by Kropp (1983), teachers who held this view displayed two distinguishing attitudes toward their goals for their students. First, they felt that the course in composition should provide students with practice in analysis, synthesis and patterns of critical thinking. Second, they felt that students should learn systematic methods of discovering content.

Berlin (1985) contended that the transactional rhetorician located reality in the interaction of the features of the rhetorical process itself, not in either an external, objective reality nor an internal, subjective one. He noted that the "distinguishing feature of the version of classical rhetoric that appeared during the 1960s and 1970s was its commitment to rationality" (p. 155). He went on to describe the elevated nature that was taken by all elements of the rhetorical situation. He argued that all of the elements--interlocutor, audience, reality and language--were not only involved in the rhetorical act but must also be taken into account when making pedagogical decisions. Similarly, rhetoricians basing their writing programs on cognitive psychology, embraced the process approach suggested by Emig and an acceptance of heuristics, especially as it pertained to invention, as proposed by Lauer (Berlin, 1985).

The need for attention to invention was most evident in Lauer's (1970) work. In it she suggested that composition teachers look to the work of psychology in search of heuristic procedures that could revitalize the composition classroom. She later suggested the importance of helping students find systematic methods of discovering answers to real problems. She stated that "[p]roblem solving as creativity uses not sets of rules but heuristic procedures, systematic but flexible guides to effective guessing" (Lauer, 1972, p. 209).

Young, Becker, and Pike (1970) also emphasized the importance of heuristic procedures, describing them as "a codification of a particular sort of cognitive skill; it is a

plan designed to help one in carrying out complex, non-routine activities . . . . It helps us translate knowledge about something into knowledgeable practice" (p. 22). In their text, they presented the tagmemic heuristic as a series of six perspectives, methods of analyzing and thinking about a subject in order to view it in ways that may have been previously unavailable to students. While Young et al. were breaking ground in the 1970s, numerous texts today provide some type or types of heuristics upon which students and teachers could refer in analyzing, synthesizing and critically considering topics. Two modern examples included the Four Worlds of Writing (Lauer, Montague, Lunsford, & Emig, 1991) and Writing Arguments: A Rhetoric with Readings (Ramage & Bean, 1995).

Using a Multi-layered Quantitative Data Analysis for Estimating Construct Validity of the SAPTFC

If the purpose of one's research is to estimate construct validity, one accepted method would be to use a multi-layered quantitative analysis of the data. In the original study that investigated these three ways of engaging in composition instruction, respondents included full-time and adjunct faculty, as well as graduate assistants. Individuals were asked to respond to 24 items related to their attitudes toward the goals, means of achieving the goals, and evaluation standards utilized in assessing student writing competence and 18 items indicating their practices in terms of means and evaluation. They were also asked to respond to forced-choice items on the primary purpose of composition instruction, the statement most reflective of their teaching style, and the acceptability of the instrument in measuring common attitudes and practices of first-year composition teachers. Data were analyzed on multiple levels using quantitative methods in order to estimate the construct validity of the instrument. Content validity was established in two ways. First, over 81% of survey respondents answered "yes" to a question regarding the face validity of the instrument measuring concepts important to composition instructors. Second, content experts who reviewed the instrument prior to dissemination attained at least 80% agreement that each of the 42 individual items were appropriate within the parameters of Broudy's (1972) theory and Kropp's (1983) operationalization of this theory to composition instruction. Criterion-related validity was supported through the ability of the SAPTFC-measured responses to account for significant amounts of variance with both Philosophical Orientation and Self-Reported classifications as criterion variables, while controlling for demographic variables. A confirmatory factor analysis yielded a multidimensional factor structure, all five factors of which contained subsets of the three constructs as theorized by Broudy. Since construct validity is based upon the weight of evidence provided by the other estimates of validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955), one could tentatively conclude that the SAPTFC demonstrated construct validity. By accepted quantitative methods, then, the SAPTFC turned out to be both valid, as indicated by the preponderance of evidence, and reliable (alpha = .833) for the sample investigated.

The Artificial Bifurcation of Methods

Elbow (2000) notwithstanding, there has been little interest in ending the battles over philosophical supremacy in the composition field; however, there has been interest in the last decade in ending the paradigm wars that have existed among the *QUALS* and the *QUANS* (Creswell, 1995; Newman & Benz, 1998; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). These debates certainly had created an artificial bifurcation of methods that do not serve the "truth value" of the research questions that we are asking. Newman (2000), for

example, has presented the notion that an inductive/deductive approach "allows one to estimate and improve the validity of their research, whether it is called qualitative or quantitative" (p. 2). Because of a growing interest in, and the relatively recent application of, mixed methodological approaches in research, a soon-to-be-published handbook of mixed methodology has also emerged (Tashakkori & Teddlie, in press).

The Importance of Purpose in the Use of a Mixed Methodological Approach

Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) identified the Pragmatists as researchers who have foregone the paradigm wars and "consider the research question to be more important than either the method they use or the worldview that is supposed to underlie the method" (p. 21). Others (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Newman & Benz, 1998) have made similar claims of the question driving the choice of method. However, Newman, Ridenour, Newman, and Demarco (In press) have posited that the question is not the lightning rod for identifying the method. More fundamentally, they "argue that the quality and, indeed, the meaningfulness of research to the public is enhanced if purposefulness is clearly a part of the researcher's thinking. . . . Stopping [at the question] . . . avoided dealing with deeper and more substantive intentions and purposes, purposes that go beyond mere 'questions.'" They have tentatively proposed that there are nine categories, or typologies, of research purposes. These purposes will often compel researchers to use a mixed methodological approach to make use of their different lenses in order to measure and reveal the conditions of their study. They also propose that researchers may begin a study with a certain purpose and, after engaging in the analysis of data, reveal new-found implications, which may modify slightly or significantly the purpose at the end of the study. Regardless, it is imperative that researchers dig deeper than their questions to identify the purpose that drove their interest in the research and articulate this up front. By doing this both researchers and readers are explicitly aware that: "Implications of the findings flow from the detours and reconceptualizations through which the original purpose traversed. That initial purpose does not disappear, but the fact that the results shift the purpose, in itself, might be the important finding or implication."

Certainly, one generally accepted purpose of using quantitative methods is to explain and predict by confirming or failing to confirm an hypothesis that has been posited. In the original study upon which this reconceptualization was based, Salzman (1997) explained particular aspects of composition instructors' attitudes and practices as indicated by both the validity and reliability estimates with this particular sample. However, there were further explanations that had yet to be explored. The researchers noted that a significant number of respondents had provided unsolicited comments and qualifications of their responses to the survey items. This prompted the need to look again at the responses through a qualitative lens. While the original purpose of validating an instrument with a particular population did not disappear, we believe that going back into the data was both reasonable and responsible. In this case, the overarching purpose was to explain this phenomenon in a more complex and sophisticated way.

## Methodology

### Sample

Subjects were instructors (N=122) in first-year composition in 14 community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities in Northeastern Ohio who in some way qualified their responses while completing the SAPTFC. The sub-sample included full-time and adjunct faculty, as well as graduate teaching assistants.

### Instrumentation

The SAPTFC contained 42 questions that were answered on a 5-point Likert scale and three forced choice responses; it was originally posited as a valid instrument (Kropp, 1983) and determined to be both valid and reliable with this population (Salzman, 1997).

### Data Analysis

Using archival data and complementing the quantitative methods previously described, the researchers adapted Kvale's (1983) steps in phenomenological research in a three-step procedure: 1) re-visiting the original raw data to identify all respondents who qualified their answers to survey items and transcribing those responses, 2) investigating the "essence" of those responses, and 3) categorizing the emerging phenomena into a set of coded data from which several themes emerged.

In doing this we engaged in several different procedures. Data were first gathered by noting which respondents qualified their answers. These respondents became the sub-sample and their surveys were separated from the larger sample. The primary author then went through these surveys item by item, noting whether comments were made in regards to specific items of the 42-item survey and whether those items were reflective of didactic, philetic, or heuristic attitudes or practices. He also noted whether additional comments were made for the three additional items, which were reflective of the: 1) purpose of first-year composition instruction; 2) description of practices most closely aligned with the respondent's; and 3) the face validity of the instrument. Finally, one other category was created for respondents who made more general comments not tied to particular aspects of the survey itself. Comments were transcribed verbatim. From this data, we derived frequency counts, percentages of respondents in the sub-sample who commented on particular items, and percentages of the overall sample which this represented.

The verbatim comments were then analyzed to determine common themes that emerged from them. The primary author read all comments and created an initial code. He then re-read comments several times to determine that comments were appropriately coded. These codes and representative comments were discussed with the co-author and appropriate adjustments were made. The themes that emerged during this process are described and representative comments provided to illustrate them. Because the data were archival, there was no opportunity to do member checking.

### Purposes of the Paper

As we considered our own purposes here, we identified three that undergirded our inquiry. In the remainder of this paper, we propose to:

- Explore the unsolicited comments toward and qualifications of survey items of a sub-sample of respondents on the SAPTFC

- Understand these participants' reactions to particular items and/or the process of completing a survey with the potential for improving the instrument and/or the interpretability of the results
- Explain in a more satisfying way the complex phenomenon which was measured by the SAPTFC

## Results

Findings appear to support the efficacy for the use of mixed methods to increase the credibility of the interpretation of the original validity estimate of the SAPTFC with the population surveyed. Over 40% of respondents (n=122) in the original study qualified their responses in some way with unsolicited comments. Those 122 respondents made 316 separate comments, ranging from single words to multiple paragraphs. While the quantitative analysis appropriate for estimating construct validity ignored these comments, the mixed method, especially the qualitative inquiry, gives voice to the issues raised by these comments and depth to the quantitative analysis.

### Analysis of Unsolicited Responses to Specific Items on the SAPTFC

Looking at Table 1 allowed us to see a pattern that went unseen in the original quantitative measures. One can see that respondents generally had more to say about the items designed to measure attitudes than practices. Of most significant concern were the items that reflected didactic attitudes, with approximately one-third of the respondents in the sub-sample providing commentary. We would like to note here that any written comment, whether it was a single word or a lengthier response, on the surveys was noted and given equal value for the frequency count. We made no effort to distinguish between individuals who made single comments and those who made multiple ones. This is important when one looks further into the specific items rather than the category of items, which we did by rank ordering the items by the number of times that they were commented upon (See Table 2). F or example, of the 41 respondents who commented on didactic attitude items, there was no clear consensus of individual items that were problematic; though item 7 provided the most red flags, items 13, 16, 19, and 42 were also often identified relatively often.

Tables 1 and 2
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### Thematic Elements in Respondents' Unsolicited Comments

Many of these qualified responses appeared to be concerns over specific wording in the survey items. Discussion of this significant point is complex and, while clearly speculative, appears to be the major concern. In a second major category of qualifications, the concerns were expressions by respondents relative to contextual situation relative to their teaching assignment, in general, or instructional activities and stances, more specifically; some of these were more specific than the instrument was designed to capture and also may have affected interpretation. A third major area of concern appeared to stem from respondents who felt that items significant to attitudes and practices of teaching composition were not represented or were not sufficiently "weighted." A final area of concern was expressed by a number of respondents who took exception to the survey itself as an instrument for measuring attitudes and practices.

Concerns Regarding Semantics. The most common of the concerns were semantic. Some of these were at the word level, specific to the use of individual terms. Item 7, for example, prompted respondents to agree or disagree with the statement "All themes should be carefully corrected by the teacher." Of the 17 respondents who commented, their most common concern was with the word *corrected*. Several respondents chose to substitute different words, such as *reviewed*, *evaluated*, *edited*. Highlighting one of the concerns with this substitution as one interprets the instruments' validity, one instructor had pointed an arrow at the word *corrected* and added the words "Edited? If so," marked it Strongly Agree, and drew an arrow to Strongly Disagree. This leaves it up to the researchers to interpret how the respondent interprets the item. We interpreted it originally to mean that the respondent strongly disagreed with the original wording but would strongly agree if the wording were changed to *edited*. It could, however, just as easily be read the other way. In either case, one loses some of the objectivity that is appealing when working with a quantitative analysis.

Besides the word level concerns, others raised issues with phrases used in the items; items 5 and 19 provide representative examples. For the former, it was the phrase *systematic methods for the discovery of content*. Respondents underlined those terms and provided comments like: *What is this?*; *Can't Answer. This is not clear to me*; and *Can systematic methods exist for the discovery of content?* For the latter, the words*form standard for expository essays* appeared to create the most opposition. Again, respondents to this item generally underlined that phrase and made claims, such as: *Unclear*; *No such thing exists*; and *Depends on what's meant by 'a form.'* We would argue that these phrases are essential to creating the distinction among the theoretical approaches. In the case of item 5, the essence of the heuristic approach is in the instructor's uses of systematic methods, like tagmemics, almost as an algorithm to assist students in synthesizing and analyzing content. For item 19, didactic instructors by operational definition would call upon expository techniques, like five-paragraph essays, as a way of helping students to interact with college-level writing expectations. In both cases, respondents' interpretations, if indeed they answered the item at all, were obviously colored by their reactions to these key phrases.

Concerns Regarding Contextual Situations. There were two types of contexts that respondents noted in their comments. In the first, instructors made reference to the context of particular assignments as being an intervening variable in their answering particular items. Item 13 (Students should be instructed to avoid first person in writing compositions) provides one example of this. Those who picked this one out, generally wrote a variation of the word *depends* as their comment. One provided a little more information on what it was her answer depended: *Depends on assignment. First person narratives or supporting evidence - yes.*

More commonly, however, the context referred to the institutional context or the context of the particular course. For some, the first-year composition course provides for little perceived autonomy on the part of the instructor, which colored the filling out of the survey for one respondent, who stated: "Please note: At [this institution], the comp course is 'set' - everyone uses the same syllabus and uses the same assignments and tests. I had little or no control over the syllabus (of course, I had full control over evaluating)." More common, though, were the responses of instructors who were not necessarily trained as composition teachers and/or who taught in programs that promoted first-year experience or writing across the curriculum. The following are representative comments from these instructors:

- Note: I am Professor of Music, but teach regularly in the core curriculum. As you should know, we teach writing across the curriculum and do not require a composition course.
- I don't 'directly' teach freshman composition. [My institution] teaches writing across the curriculum. Writing is incorporated into First Year Seminars which are discipline based. The first year seminar in education (my department) is . . . Diversity, Deviance and the Educated Person. My answers are based on teaching freshmen under these conditions
- Because our . . . classes are not strictly 'freshmen composition' classes, it is difficult to think of them as such with some of the questions
- Because [the course] is not solely a comp class, there are some serious restrictions on what can be done. Also, I'm not a comp instructor by training.

In other cases, respondents were in a more traditional setting and trained as English instructors. Of those who commented, many indicated that they had completed the survey based upon their most recent course taught (which was what they were instructed to do), but that their responses would be different had they taught a different first-year composition course.

- This [survey] depends on course - I'll focus on research paper
- But it doesn't identify levels of composition. What I want and <u>can</u> do with 103 level kids is 100% less than with 114 level.
- The last course was 112; my answers would vary if I had been considering 111.
- Some of these do not really apply to 112, the last (current) course taught. Answers would be significantly different if applied to 111
- I also taught English for Developmental Ed Students. The majority of my courses are in this area, so this survey is completed from that mind set. I do teach freshman comp at least twice in an academic year.

<u>Concerns Regarding "Weightier" Issues Related to Composition Instruction.</u> Some of the respondents appeared to be resisting the naturally limiting, and potentially limited, way that is a function of surveys with Likert scales and forced-choice responses. These became especially evident when respondents neared the end of the survey. The last three items were used as dependent measures on the regression analyses and were also the top three items for respondents' comments (see Table 3). Many of these comments dealt with "weightier" issues that respondents felt were not reflected or could not be reflected on a survey instrument.

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Table 3
About here

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A number of respondents who perceived the survey to be unable to reflect accurately the complexity of teaching composition and the decisions and actions that represent those decisions. In responding to item 41, for instance, one instructor identified an apparent contradiction in his own response from one item to another and noted:

> There is an apparent contradiction, I suppose, in saying on one hand that I usually evaluate for style rather than content, and on the other that I do

evaluate for maturity of content. I try to distinguish between ideas (that is to say content) that I like or agree with, and ideas that show maturity. I tell students I will suppress, if possible, my positive response to "liked" content or negative response to "disliked" content, but that shallow, trite, trivial, whatever, will be poorly evaluated and "disliked" out of hand.

While questioning the ability of the instrument to capture the complex nature of his teaching, that instructor still identified it as valid. Others, too, perceived the instrument as valid with the following caveats:

- But it is a very blunt instrument
- However, the marginal comments illustrate that teaching composition does not necessarily involve adherence to only one method - additional choices reflecting combining methods would have made me feel more comfortable with my answers and would have allowed me to answer the penultimate questions.
- Some of them; many concerns unaddressed by this survey.
- But you've given short shrift to originality, fresh expression, flow of ideas, and concise, precise word choices.
- But not all of them. You're interested in collaboration or peer workshops? Not interested in teaching to encourage rhetorical effectiveness of a document?

While those instructors identified the survey as valid, others who questioned the inability of the instrument to measure their attitudes and practices completely or with the complexity required, either chose not to respond at all or identified the survey to be invalid in measuring concerns of composition instructors. They provided the following comments:

- What about bringing in attitudes and responsibilities of students as seen by instructors. Apathy is widespread.
- I didn't see any questions about peer review (oops, I missed #27, at first), outside audiences, or collaborative writing
- I can't tell. The problem with such a form is that most teaching is not quantified. Of course grammar, syntax, etc., are important; the only reason, however, for concentrating on them is to achieve an approximation of standard written English (see The New Yorker). They are not worthy of attention otherwise -- this questionnaire skews the results you will get by the nature of the questions: 'Is the student encouraged to find his/her own voice?' Where? In a journal entry? How about a research paper? How about an essay contrasting the ideas in some material in the reader? What do you mean by individual voice? I see that my individual voice here is querolous and crabby? Is that a voice I should use consistently? What is?

Concerns Regarding the Use of Survey Instruments. The previous comments were generally of a philosophical nature regarding issues of interest and concern for composition instructors. These final comments were more pointed in their negative opinions of survey research, in general, and this survey, in particular.

- None of these [descriptions of instruction were checked]. These jargon laden statements are silly & symbolic of the reason education experts have little influence on their colleagues

- This is a very bad survey. The questions are slanted; they assume oppositions which do not necessarily exist; they clearly reflect - and are designed to evoke support for - the evaluators [sic.] presuppositions and biases. Re-do the survey.
- Good luck with your work. If you don't mind some advice (and I'm going to give it whether you mind it or not so if you really do mind - LOOK AWAY NOW! Okay, too late, I'll give it), it seems as if you're already making many assumptions about the teaching of writing - assumptions which may or may not be true but in either case you shouldn't depend on them - and those assumptions appear to be guiding the research methods. I've never found surveys such as this one to be of much value, but this one in particular has certain ideas already formed about the teaching of composition that are going to undoubtedly skew the results and prevent you from finding/representing a true picture of the teaching of writing. I'd suggest other methods - observations, interviews, writing, etc. - if you really want to do accurate research.
- This instrument is too transparent to be useful. Your survey is difficult to complete because of its design. Many of your statements are too obviously formulated and they are then paired with their political opposites. As a college teacher for 30 years (and, yes, I've taught freshmen in all of those years), I can tell you that teaching composition is a lot more complicated than your questions allow. You'll never arrive at some easy grouping of conservative and progressive writing teachers by this means - unless you've already made up your mind and are simply trying to get some kind of social science confirmation.
- I was happy to participate in your survey of freshman composition teachers. However, the structure and implied bias of some of the questions concerned me, and I would like to comment on why I chose not to answer certain questions. One striking example of a question with obvious bias is #15: "Revision should be accompanied by help and praise from the instructor to provide support for the student in this difficult and demanding process." This question presupposes (or at least encourages) a "strongly agree" response by assuming tht revision is a "difficult and demanding process." Who, then, would not agree that "help and praise" should accompany it? It seems that more impartial wording would yield a more accurate response here. In general, your survey seems to imply an overall preference for teaching that is evaluation-free and designed to encourage students' self-expression and growth. This kind of teaching is valuable; however, it need not be mutually exclusive of other pedagogies, as your final questions seem to suggest it must be. These final questions troubled me the most, and you will notice that I chose not to answer them. I do not feel that there is one primary purpose of a composition course; such a course should "prepare students for academic writing" AND "contribute to students' personal growth" AND "contribute to students' intellectual growth." To ask your respondents to choose only one creates a constraint that would seem to produce inaccurate results.

As in the previous section, some of these comments appear to be borne out of the respondents' experiences and feelings about the limitations of survey research to accurately capture a phenomenon. Ironically, these respondents shed light on their own apparent biases toward survey research while decrying the biases that they believe were inherent in the instrument itself. Certainly, the items were worded to capture the essences of these different philosophical approaches. That there might be a preference implied for one approach over the others did not appear to be the case when we chose to use this instrument. That it appears to be so to some respondents, though, is clearly a significant insight, one which future researchers should be aware if they use this instrument.

Final Thoughts on the Results

As one can see from these unsolicited comments, some of the individuals saw the survey items, or the survey itself, as threats, others saw a philosophical challenge to their ways of seeing the world and reacted to this challenge in ways that we had not intended. Some individuals, for example, reacted vehemently against various fields of inquiry and ways of knowing. Certainly, in trying to serve the purpose of improving both the instrument and the interpretability of the results, the importance of the insights uncovered through the qualitative inquiry of data is richer and more specific than a quantitative analysis could be. As the data also reveal, one cannot make clear, unequivocal conclusions without considering that these phenomena may be a function of the choice of instruments or unique to specific composition instructors, higher educators, or both. Interestingly, when we first began this analysis, we assumed (in fact, if the purpose of this study led us to quantitative analysis, we would have hypothesized) that those who chose to respond would have been significantly more likely to have considered the instrument invalid. In fact, that turned out not to be the case (see Table 4), as least as reflective of the differences between those who responded, either yes or no to the final item on the survey, which was included to determine face validity for respondents (see Appendix). That is, that respondents who provided these comments appeared to be representative of the larger sample, at least in terms of percentages. What we did discover was that the subgroup of those who chose not to respond always provided some type of rationale for their unwiliingness to provide either a yes or no response to the question as to whether they believed the survey was reflective of issues and concerns of composition teachers.

## Discussion and Conclusions

As we frame our discussion, we believe it's important to go back to purpose. The original purpose of doing this study was to estimate the construct validity of the SAPTFC with a sample of first-year college composition instructors. We should also note here that there was neither effort nor intent to engage in what Creswell (1995) has called a two-phase design. In the two-phase design, the researchers would have intentionally planned a qualitative data gathering phase as a way to complement the quantitative analysis. We intended to gather no such data. Lacking such intention, we believe there is an even more compelling reason in the current study to look at the data through mixed methodological lenses.

The original quantitative analysis did what we expected and served our original purpose well. That is, it gave us traditional estimates of reliability and construct validity. However, virtually all quantitative methodologists caution researchers to sample specific responses and potential confoundings that may affect the interpretation of the data.

These may include subjects' attitudes toward the instrument, the format, wording, etc. Some of this was done in the initial content validation, but having only five experts, those who bring a different understanding to the jargon and terminology, will not necessarily identify the concerns of the larger population, some of whom clearly identified themselves as not being trained in the field. We attempted to expand this insight by expanding the qualitative interpretation. And what we found was indeed additional information that added to the depth of the quantitative data.

That said, we also recognize that we cannot give undue attention to minority views. For example, nearly one-third of the sub-sample provided one or more comments on items reflective of didactic attitudes. When we look beyond this sub-sample and expand our field of vision to look at the larger picture, though, a relatively small number of respondents (13.5% of entire sample) chose to comment on didactic attitudes items. The quantitative researcher, even aware of this, would likely and comfortably reject their concerns, especially given the sample size and the medium to large effect sizes (Salzman, 1997). These unsolicited comments, however, added information to which we would have been less sensitive because the psychometrics provided camouflage for some potential concerns of respondents.

Given this inquiry, the interpretability of the results of the SAPTFC must be reconsidered. The most significant concerns to us appeared to be raised by those who noted the effect that their situational context, either institution or particular course, had on their abilities to accurately respond to the survey. It was clearly naive to assume that first-year composition is FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION, as if there were some "everycourse" that all college students would take. In fact, it is not only conceivable but likely that the same instructor may take a more philetic approach in the first course (one that may focus more on personal writing as the lead author has experienced as an instructor at two of the institutions surveyed) of a two or more course sequence and a heuristic or didactic approach in a course devoted to research or "scholarly" writing in a writing-across-the-curriculum course. Any future efforts to use this instrument, then, would likely yield more valid results if instructors had an opportunity to respond to a description of courses most reflective of the one that they are considering as they answer the items.

Purpose Reconsidered

In this study, we have been able to investigate, in a fuller way, data which could have potentially been ignored. Looking at the information, though, and analyzing it with the purpose of trying to better explain a complex phenomenon, provided us a way to re-think whether the original purpose was sufficient and satisfying, or whether it was even intellectually honest. We have chosen to present the information as we have because it allowed us one way of thinking through this complexity and met our needs of the moment. Had our purpose been different, we would have likely used different analytical tools and presented the information differently.

For instance, if our purpose were to improve the instrument, we could have used the qualitative data gathered on items, like number 7, and provided a word that was less inflammatory than *corrected* but still carried the meaning that we intended. We could have also added items that reflect some of the very real philosophical and practical concerns that were voiced by respondents, giving more attention to issues like collaborative writing, rhetorical effectiveness, etc., which would have potentially given us a more accurate and fuller picture of instructors' practices and attitudes toward them. If, however, our purpose were to explain or predict the characteristics of survey

respondents who are likely to provide unsolicited comments, we could have coded the data appropriately and run a discriminant analysis to determine which variables distinguish these instructors from those who would not comment. In each of these cases, we need both qualitative and quantitative data. Acting iteratively between and within the two approaches, we have at our disposal a methodology that has the potential to improve the interpretability beyond what could be done with a single approach.

Educational Importance

All researchers are compelled to ask of themselves the question: So what? This year's theme is validity and value in research, and we in the research community owe a great deal to quantitative researchers, their methodologies, and their studies for the contributions they have made to our knowledge base, especially efforts at establishing construct validity of survey instruments. The intent of a survey is to answer specific questions. In this case, the survey was intended to ask and answer the questions: How do composition teachers' attitudes inform their practices? and How do composition teachers' practices influence their attitudes toward planning and delivering instruction, as well as evaluating student writing? Substantively, there are numerous camps that seek to inform the work of compositionists. If we accept the value of doing research to improve pedagogy, we also accept the assumption that both methodology and data collection procedures must be relevant and valid.

The use of a well-designed and statistically-sophisticated quantitative study allowed the authors to advance a tentative claim that the SAPTFC has acceptable validity and reliability estimates, at least with the population sampled. If their research questions and purposes require the use of such an instrument, others who study composition can use this as a starting point in their own studies. In some ways of thinking, there would be no reason to revisit the issue of validity since the results supported the hypotheses. Clearly, however, there are limitations to the value of this quantitatively-informed interpretation of a valid instrument when over 40% of respondents felt the need or desire to comment upon and/or qualify their responses. By mixing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, we have been able to "use the advantages of both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms [which] best mirrors the research process of working back and forth between inductive and deductive models of thinking" (Creswell, 1995, p. 178). In this way, using both paradigms for meeting the purposes of research can improve researchers' claims of the credibility of their research.

Ultimately, all research is heuristic. This is why researchers suggest avenues for future research based upon their inquiries. We realize that there are a number of ways that we could take this research. Our first intention is to split the population and re-analyze the data to determine the stability of the quantitative findings across the two sub-samples. More significantly, we suggest that using this type of mixed methodology (i.e., thinking about how to look at data) provides a more comprehensive and pragmatically meaningful way to look at and interpret data, both for the theorist and the practitioner.

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## Appendix

## Tables

Table 1

Frequency Counts of Categories of Unsolicited Responses on SAPTFC

| Category of Item | Freq | % of Sub-sample | % of Sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Didactic Attitudes | 41 | 33.6% | 13.5% |
| 2. Philetic Attitudes | 25 | 20.4% | 8.2% |
| 3. Heuristic Attitudes | 19 | 15.6% | 6.3% |
| 4. Didactic Practices | 17 | 13.9% | 5.6% |
| 5. Philetic Practices | 18 | 14.8% | 5.9% |
| 6. Heuristic Practices | 21 | 17.2% | 6.9% |

Note. N of subsample = 122. N of Sample = 303. Individual items were categorized according to their intended purpose (e.g., 41 different individuals made one or more unsolicited comments for one or more of the eight items that comprised the didactic attitudes category on the SAPTFC)

Table 2

Rank Order of Frequency Counts of Unsolicited Responses to Individual Items on SAPTFC

| Item # | Category | Freq | % of Sub-sample | % of Sample |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Miscellaneous Comments | 18 | 14.8% | 5.9% |
| 7 | Didactic Attitudes | 17 | 13.9% | 5.6% |
| 24 | Heuristic Attitudes | 11 | 9.0% | 3.6% |
| 39 | Philetic Practices | 11 | 9.0% | 3.6% |
| 13 | Didactic Attitudes | 10 | 8.2% | 3.3% |
| 16 | Didactic Attitudes | 10 | 8.2% | 3.3% |
| 19 | Didactic Attitudes | 9 | 7.4% | 3.0% |
| 20 | Philetic Attitudes | 9 | 7.4% | 3.0% |
| 42 | Didactic Practices | 9 | 7.4% | 3.0% |
| 5 | Heuristic Attitudes | 8 | 6.6% | 2.6% |
| 10 | Philetic Attitudes | 7 | 5.7% | 2.3% |
| 22 | Philetic Attitudes | 7 | 5.7% | 2.3% |
| 30 | Heuristic Practices | 6 | 4.9% | 2.0% |
| 41 | Heuristic Practices | 6 | 4.9% | 2.0% |
| 2 | Philetic Attitudes | 5 | 4.1% | 1.7% |
| 15 | Philetic Attitudes | 5 | 4.1% | 1.7% |
| 28 | Heuristic Practices | 5 | 4.1% | 1.7% |
| 29 | Didactic Practices | 5 | 4.1% | 1.7% |
| 34 | Philetic Practices | 5 | 4.1% | 1.7% |
| 37 | Philetic Practices | 5 | 4.1% | 1.7% |

Note. N of subsample = 122. N of Sample = 303. Remainder of the items had 4 unsolicited comments or fewer. Only Item 17, an Heuristic Attitudes prompt, received no unsolicited remarks.

Table 3

Frequency Counts of Unsolicited Responses on Dependent Measures of SAPTFC

| Category of Item | Freq | % of Sub-sample | % of Sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Purpose of Instruction | 25 | 20.4% | 8.2% |
| 2. Description of Practices | 28 | 22.9% | 9.2% |
| 3. Validity of SAPTFC | 40 | 32.7% | 13.2% |

Note. N of Sub-sample = 122. N of Sample = 303. Statements of Purpose of Instruction and Description of Practices were designed to reflect the 3 different theoretical positions; the validity prompt asked for face validity from respondents after completing the survey.

Table 4

Responses to Validity of SAPTFC from Full Sample of Original Study and Sub-Sample of Current Study

| | Valid | Not Valid | Pct. | No Response | Cum. Pct. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Full Sample of Original Study | 247 | 41 | 85.9% | 15 | 81.5% |
| 2. Sub-Sample of Current Study | 88 | 19 | 82.2% | 15 | 72.1% |

Note. N of Sub-sample of Current Study = 122. N of Sample of Original Study = 303.

**Survey of Attitudes and Practices of Teachers of Freshman Composition**

Part I

Please indicate your most immediate response to each of the following statements (5 = "strongly agree" and 1 = "strongly disagree") in relationship to your feelings about writing instruction.

| A. Goals | SA | | | | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. A primary obligation of the instructor in composition is to teach students to avoid errors in usage, sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. In the course in composition, the student should learn to express personal views honestly. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. In the course in composition, the student should learn to use skills necessary for the production of correct, standard English prose. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. The course in composition should provide practice in analysis, synthesis, and patterns of critical thinking. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. In the course in composition, the student should learn to use systematic methods for the discovery of content. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. In the course in composition, the student should come to view writing as an important means of self-expression and satisfaction. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| B. Means | | | | | |
| 7. All themes should be carefully corrected by the teacher. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. Students should be taught systematic methods for asking questions related to the topic to be discussed. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. Standard patterns of rhetorical organization and development (e.g., classification, comparison-contrast, etc.) should be formally emphasized in the course in composition. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. Evaluation-free writing should be used frequently in the course. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11. Sentence combining is a powerful technique that should be used to increase linguistic and intellectual competence. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. Classroom activities should be carefully designed to reduce threat and build trust. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 13. Students should be instructed to avoid first person pronouns in their writing. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 14. Individual conferences should be used to support the student and to build trust between student and teacher. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 15. Revision should be accompanied by help and praise from the instructor to provide support for the student in this difficult and demanding process. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 16. Students should receive direct instruction in the rules of grammar and mechanics, frequently followed by practice exercises. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 17. Students should be taught how to brainstorm, how to ask questions, how to analyze a topic. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

| | SA SD |
|---|---|
| 18. Methods of development in writing should be taught as methods of thinking and problem solving. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| C. Evaluation | |
| In order to receive a grade of "C" or better: | |
| 19. The composition should demonstrate the student's ability to organize his or her thoughts according to a form standard for expository essays. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 20. The student's writing should demonstrate an honest expression of his or her views. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 21. The student's writing should demonstrate the discovery of ideas through clear and consistent thinking. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 22. The student's writing should demonstrate originality in some form related to content, organization, or personal style. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 23. The composition should be relatively free of error. (With one or two minor exceptions, depending on the length of the paper.) | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 24. The student's writing should demonstrate an advance toward more mature thinking than that evidenced in the first several papers written in the course. | 5 4 3 2 1 |

Part II

The following statements are intended to represent statements of fact that do or do not apply to your own teaching of composition in the last writing course that you taught. Please respond to these statements according to what was actually done in that course. (5 = constantly used; 4 = frequently used; 3 = occasionally used; 2 = seldom used; and 1 = never used.)

| A. Means | C F O S N |
|---|---|
| 25. Errors in sentence structure and grammar were consistently pointed out to students. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 26. Certain class sessions were devoted to practice in various types of brainstorming. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 27. Students worked with their peers and instructor(s) in a relaxed setting in developing their topics, in rewriting, and in evaluating others' writing. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 28. In the course, the students and I used sentence combining as a means of illustrating the writer's options. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 29. Students were taught that every paragraph should begin with a topic sentence (with the exceptions of introductory and concluding paragraphs). | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 30. Topics for written essays were presented as problems in thinking. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 31. I used standard exercises designed to enable students to practice the conventions of correct usage. | 5 4 3 2 1 |

32. I lectured to students in order to inform them of the rules governing correct usage and clear organization. 5 4 3 2 1

33. Students were provided with support, encouragement, and help in revising their essays before such essays were evaluated. 5 4 3 2 1

34. Students were encouraged to develop their own personal styles. 5 4 3 2 1

35. Writing assignments emphasized methods of invention rather than teacher-designed topics. 5 4 3 2 1

36. Praise as an aid to the student's morale was deliberately employed in the form of comments on papers, as well as through in-class and individual conference feedback. 5 4 3 2 1

Evaluation

37. Students were individually evaluated (i.e., standards set for some students were appropriately different from standards set for others). 5 4 3 2 1

38. Essays were evaluated chiefly for their manner of expression or form, not for matter or content. 5 4 3 2 1

39. Grades were eliminated as much as possible to allow students freedom of expression and opportunity for self-evaluation. 5 4 3 2 1

40. Evaluation in the form of comments and questions was systematically used to guide students' growth in critical thought. 5 4 3 2 1

41. The content of students' essays was judged for its intellectual maturity. 5 4 3 2 1

42. Grades were used as a most effective way to motivate students to improve their writing. 5 4 3 2 1

**Final Questions**

What should be the primary purpose of the course in composition? (Please check only one)

____ To prepare students for academic writing, including research and report writing.
____ To contribute to students' personal growth.
____ To contribute to students' intellectual growth.

Please check the one description that you feel best describes your teaching as it relates to freshmen composition.

____ Instruction is done in explicit ways and organized in logical sequence. My teaching tends toward direct instruction of materials and skills which are derived from clear objectives. Frequent, formal evaluation of student writings is undertaken.

____ Instruction is indirect in nature. My students engage in disciplined inquiry to work out their own ideas on teacher-designed topics. Formal evaluation is often withheld until late in the course.

____ Instruction is indirect in nature. My teaching is exemplified by activities that encourage student-designed topics in a relaxed setting. Ideally, formal evaluation would be unnecessary, replaced by student's and teacher's recognition of growth.

Does this survey appear to measure common attitudes and practices of concern to teachers of composition?

____ Yes ____ No

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